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BOUNDARY CONCEPTS AND
PRACTICES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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PREFACE

This Memorandum was prepared as a contribution to a continuing program of research, undertaken by The RAND Corporation for the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense, into problems of infiltration and invasion control for Vietnam. The present study is intended to provide background material and to supply a perspective, based on analysis of Southeast Asia as contrasted with Western views on borders, territory, and sovereignty, that may be useful when more technical studies of border security are undertaken.

SUMMARY

The manner in which territory is divided is often of critical importance to people. The European approach to territorial problems differs from ways of looking at territorial problems in other parts of the world, and is not always relevant to the needs of indigenous populations. Western boundary concepts are essentially legalistic in nature. The Western state is defined in territorial terms and sovereignty resides in the totality of the national territory. Maps, treaties, and well-defined borders are consequently a vital part of the Western territorial outlook.

Western concepts are illustrated in the political and administrative practices of the European colonial powers in their ventures into Asian territory. Confronted with political instability in Southeast Asia, Europeans responded by attempting to define borders with gradually increasing precision. Agreement on boundaries became more urgent as colonial competition became more intense. Thus, the colonial boundary system was designed to stabilize spheres of influence without major commitments of resources. This system responded to colonial, rather than local, needs and was maintained by imperial power, ignoring local factors and introducing extraneous political considerations and alien concepts into the region. The colonial boundary system provided border security, in the form of assurance against invasion or large-scale territorial encroachment, but no effort was made to provide strict control of civilian movement across national boundaries. In the past, streams, rivers, and mountain ranges were selected as

"natural" boundaries, often in disregard of the cultural unity of river valley and upland civilizations. There was no concerted effort to develop an effective administrative apparatus for the remote interior where most boundaries were located.

Because of the absence of strict enforcement of colonial boundaries, normal civilian traffic and the wanderings and migrations of upland peoples were not significantly interrupted during the colonial period, and little machinery was developed as a basis for administration by successor states. The local environment continued to exert a strong influence on the pattern of life in the region, a pattern that has not changed greatly from ancient times to the present, particularly in far-flung interior provinces.

In traditional Southeast Asia, order and surveillance were not easily maintained in remote areas. Sovereignty was not defined in a rigorous territorial sense. Marginal territorial concessions were a legitimate instrument of national policy, and were not viewed as fatal to the kingdom. A shifting frontier, based on transitory power relationships, was a means of gauging and aligning the international equilibrium. Sovereignty was as important to Southeast Asian principalities as it was to the oldest nations of Europe, but the content was different: in Southeast Asia, the preservation of sovereignty was less dependent upon the maintenance of absolute territorial integrity.

Although decolonization has shown that many European solutions to Southeast Asian problems lasted only as long as imperial power, the colonial presence altered the terms

in which many issues were subsequently dealt with. Most Southeast Asian nations owe their present boundary alignments to colonial action, and they must rely on European precedents and techniques to deal with contemporary issues. However, colonial boundary policy was not always consistent. Southeast Asian leaders inherited a boundary system that, in its broad outlines, was satisfactory as a basis for modern nationhood, but these nations were not ethnically integrated and they lacked the administrative apparatus either to enforce their borders or to build out to them. These problems are still reflected in bureaucratic incentives and practices.

The result is a multiple standard. Boundary policy is composed of a set of interrelated, but not necessarily consistent elements; specific elements should not always be taken as representative of overall policy. In developing countries, the complexities of boundary policy are of continuing concern. This policy involves considerations at the international, boundary state, domestic, and local levels, and there is an important dimension of consistency, coordination and control among these levels. In any boundary dispute, not only the boundary area itself, but also a broad range of political considerations, from relations with local tribes to national positions in international forums, come into question.

Vietnamese border policy, and thus United States assistance in the area of border security, must take into account both international pressures, stemming from the conflicts in Laos and Cambodia as well as within Vietnam, and international repercussions that might arise from boundary policy options. However, policy at the international level is only one element of boundary policy.

One country cannot take unilateral steps to ensure its own border security without affecting the interests of the other countries that share the same border. In the effort to enhance the stability of South Vietnam, care should be taken not to create unnecessary instability in Cambodia and Laos, which must reckon with numbers of North Vietnamese infiltrators that they are powerless to control.

Border security problems can be understood not only in terms of the "hardness" of the border itself, but also in terms of the administrative challenge of extending the government's reach into isolated areas. Sanctuary, for example, does not always depend on the presence of an international border. In the early stages of insurgency, internal sanctuaries are likely to be equally important even though they are usually given less prominence.

Border control has not received high priority from past Vietnamese governments, partly for historical reasons, and partly because both the French colonialists and the United States have occupied themselves with border security tasks. As the United States has assumed the burden of an intensive air interdiction campaign, it may have unintentionally continued to undermine the incentives for the Government of the Republic of Vietnam to improve and expand its own efforts in this field.

The qualities of Vietnam's international boundaries, and the patterns of settlement that have evolved around them, also do little to facilitate effective border control. These boundaries, originally established by the French as internal administrative divisions, were not intended to withstand the pressures placed on international boundaries,

particularly not under conditions of insurgency and large-scale infiltration. Commerce, tribal movements, and general mobility across these borders have continued largely unimpeded into the present era.

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I. WESTERN BOUNDARY CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Territory is important to people; the manner in which it is divided up is often critical. The European approach to territorial problems developed mainly in response to European historical experience; the traditional literature in the fields of geography and history makes scant reference to non-Western boundary concepts and practices. European and Southeast Asian approaches to territorial issues differ significantly. In the aggregate, the differences are imposing, if somewhat abstract; in detail, the continuing disparities in outlook and administrative practice are of considerable relevance to current policy decisions.

This analysis will attempt to develop models of Western and Southeast Asian experience by reference to historical example. The intent is to demonstrate the influence of the local environment on the development and interaction of two rather distinct ways of thinking about boundaries, territory and sovereignty.

Some of the principal common assumptions of modern Western boundary concepts may be summarized as follows:

It is necessary and desirable for every state to have boundaries that can be represented by lines drawn on maps. Except for inaccessible or unimportant remote areas, these boundaries should be suitably demarcated on the corresponding terrain. Boundaries should be codified in treaties and sanctioned by law. Where boundaries do not exist, or old ones no longer apply, they should be drawn (just as, when no maps exist, or present maps are poor, new maps

should be drawn). Thus, one statement on the function of boundaries between modern states:

the character of the modern state necessitates the establishment of clear-cut limits of its area of authority and organization. For all its multifarious activities . . . its territory must be clearly bounded, not by frontier areas, but by unmistakable lines. Such lines are inter-State boundaries. Without them, the present system of states might well be reduced to a chaotic condition, since it would be impossible to know where the sovereignty of one State ended and that of another began.*

A frontier, as opposed to a boundary line, is regarded as a zone of less contact and hence of less definition, and it is expected that all frontiers will, sooner or later, be resolved into boundaries. Boundaries must be drawn so as to include all of the territory of the sovereign state. The purpose of a boundary is

. . . to mark in no unmistakable manner the limit of the territory in which the State exercises its sovereign power with all the trappings which that exercise carries with it.**

A state without territory is not possible.***

On one and the same territory there can exist one full sovereign State only.****

In the ideology of modern international politics all states are sovereign and every piece of the earth's surface must . . . be the rightful legal possession of one and only one such state.*****

* A. E. Moodie, Geography Behind Politics, Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., London, 1961, p. 73.

** Ibid., p. 81 (Moodie is a geographer).

*** L. Oppenheim, International Law, A Treatise, 8th ed., H. Lauterpacht (ed.), David McKay Co., Inc., New York, 1962, p. 451.

**** Ibid., p. 452.

***** E. R. Leach, "The Frontiers of Burma," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1960,

A state is thus defined territorially, and state sovereignty resides within the totality of the national territory.

COLONIAL PRACTICES

What we have referred to as "Western concepts" are illustrated in the political and administrative practices of the European colonial powers in their ventures into Asian territory.

When they arrived in Southeast Asia, the Europeans were confronted with an extremely dynamic -- and therefore precarious -- situation. Historical movements of lowland peoples, under way for centuries, were continuing, and these movements exerted pressure on uplanders as well.* Lowland states were engaged in what seemed to be perennial warfare. The Vietnamese were expanding** to the south at the expense of the Lao. The Thais increased the pressure on both Lao and Khmer (Cambodian) realms with their own ventures to the east.

The local powers were constantly embroiled in succession disputes and other quarrels. Long before the Europeans arrived, Thailand and Vietnam had repeatedly intervened in the internal affairs of their weaker neighbors, seizing

p. 49. (Leach is an anthropologist. This view is not his own, but his interpretation of "European myth.")

*For a discussion of the relations between lowland and upland peoples, see below, p. 15.

**For a stimulating interpretation and further references, see M. G. Cotter, "Toward a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement," Journal of Southeast Asian History, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 12-24.

opportunities provided by contested succession in the strife-torn Laotian and Cambodian kingdoms.*

Because of the conflicts between the older peoples, such as the Pyus, Mons, Khmers and Chams, and the newer immigrants, the Burmans, Thais and Vietnamese, "the shape of mainland Southeast Asian boundaries had not yet become stabilized"** when the colonial powers arrived.

Not only were there no stable, delimited or demarcated boundaries, but even the concept of a boundary line was alien to the Southeast Asian experience. Within the region, the functional equivalent of borders consisted of zones of contact and intermittent positional warfare, within which the limits of extension of the "sovereignty" of each kingdom or principality were determined by a power relationship that was always subject to change.***

The legal and cartographic instruments of border definition were also absent,**** as was a tradition of nationalism that attached anything more than bargaining value to

* For fascinating accounts, see The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era: The Fourth Reign, C. K. Flood, trans., Vols. 1 and 2, The Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, Tokyo, 1966.

** Alastair Lamb, Asian Frontiers, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1968, p. 39.

*** Thus the British historian, Harvey, could write of a "bedlam of snarling Shan states" which, to the European eye, were "wriggling like worms."

**** The following entry occurs in The Dynastic Chronicles, p. 368 for B. E. 2409 (A.D. 1866):

It was contemplated by the King that the Mekong River separated the territory of Siam from those of Cambodia and Vietnam. Now France had been surveying and marking maps of the river area, and France was the only country that was doing this. It seemed unwise for the Siamese not to do the same. The King therefore commanded [a

remote territory, whose inhabitants hardly identified themselves with the lowland centers. While the essence of sovereignty was of great importance, the territorial aspect of sovereignty was in fact negotiable.

The original European interlopers in Asia, from the Portuguese to the Dutch, English, French, and Spanish, wished primarily to develop trade. Since it was more difficult to control than to conquer new territory, and cost-conscious colonialists had limited resources (especially in terms of manpower), the acquisition of territory was, at first, of only secondary interest.

This interest eventually became a steadily growing one, for economic and security reasons. The Dutch, for example, found island trading to be insufficiently profitable unless a monopoly could be enforced by political and military means. The Portuguese, confronted with similar problems, were originally content to control only selected strategic outposts that would have allowed them to dominate island trade through pre-eminence on the seas. For over a century, the British in India "managed to limit their Indian possessions to the minimum area which they felt was called for as a base for their commercial operations." However,

Once in possession of one Indian province, the British were faced with the problem of the security of that province's frontier with districts not under their control. Frontier crises led to trans-frontier campaigns and the extension of the Frontier.*

nobleman] to seek out and hire an Englishman who had experience in map-making. [The nobleman] hired a Mr. D. . . .

* Lamb, Asian Frontiers, p. 55.

Once firmly established in India, the British felt obliged to assume control over confused or hostile border areas such as Burma, which were incapable of withstanding the mobilized power of the subcontinent.

The economic incentive for expansion in quest of stable and profitable resources was matched by a territorial drive spurred on by competition among the colonial powers. The gradual British conquest of Burma, which lasted three-quarters of a century, and the somewhat more precipitous French expansion in Indochina, brought these two major powers into a progressively more dangerous confrontation in the nineteenth century. The competing colonizers rushed toward each other's frontiers in their efforts to secure their own possessions and deny other prizes to their traditional rivals:

As indigenous power throughout Southeast Asia appeared in process of swift disintegration, the resulting surge of both British and French influence throughout the area gave promise of the development of a dangerous adjacency of borders in the near future.**

However, once these converging forces reached a certain critical distance from each other, the movement slowed and then stalemated as diplomatic efforts were made to forestall any outbreak of hostilities. While the British and French were both driven at least partially in their territorial

* J. F. Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1964, p. 380.

** Claire Hirshfield, "The Struggle for the Mekong Banks, 1892-1896," Journal of Southeast Asian History, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1968, pp. 25-27. This account makes extensive use of private papers that have only recently become available. See also Charles Crosthwaite, The Pacification of Upper Burma, Edward Arnold, London, 1912.

ambitions by a sense of competition,* this competition tended to be self-limiting: while expanding, both empires strove to avoid direct contact, either through buffers or through the expedient of agreed borders. The imperial powers wished to avoid disastrous armed conflict with each other, and had enough experience with misunderstandings and minor skirmishes to appreciate the real dangers of imperial confrontation. Restraint was an important element of the colonial boundary system. In colonial Southeast Asia, Thailand was the principal beneficiary of mutual caution on the part of the French and British. As Jean Gottman has written in a general context,

A boundary is not simply maintained in place because the political forces of the two "compartments" which it separates reach an equilibrium in opposition to each other. Such a theory would assume that there is always opposition between one side and the other of a boundary, that the policy of every state worthy of the name tends toward territorial aggrandizement.**

Boundary lines are neither uniform nor homogeneous; they are not "political isobars."*** A boundary is not

*It is often written that the French indulged a "sentimental" desire to "reach the Mekong," which they originally hoped would provide them with a trade route to China. See J. L. Christian, "Anglo-French Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Its Historical Geography and Diplomatic Climate," The Geographical Review, Vol. 31, 1941, pp. 272-282, and Hirshfield, op. cit.

**Jean Gottman, La Politique des états et leur géographie, Armand Colin, Paris, 1952, p. 139.

***A term misused by Jacques Ancel, in La Géographie des frontières, Gallimard, Paris, 1938.

only relational -- a "momentary and transitory" expression of the power and interest of two adjacent polities; it may also be a factor for stability.* Agreement on the definition of borders can be an expression of mutual interest in avoiding conflict and, over time, a stable border can become an important element of the status quo.

Political and economic factors led the colonial powers to enlarge their dominions and then to strive for definition and codification of the limits of their sovereignty. Many of the colonial boundaries bore a superficial resemblance to the broad outlines of earlier indigenous states, though this was

the outcome not of any particular desire to preserve the older units, but . . . rather [a result of] the controlling influence exerted in this area of extremely accidented relief by the great riverine and sea routes, which had likewise moulded the earlier patterns.**

In spite of this apparent resemblance, a new and alien concept of boundaries had been introduced. Europeans brought artillery, treaties, and maps to Southeast Asia, and felt that they had introduced order and stability to the region. But the colonial administrative pattern in the hinterlands stayed roughly as it had been in pre-colonial days; there was little additional economic or governmental penetration of the interior fringe areas.

* See E. Fischer, "On Boundaries," World Politics, Vol. 1, No. 2, January 1949, pp. 196-222.

** C. A. Fischer, "Southeast Asia: The Balkans of the Orient?" Geography, Vol. 27, 1962, p. 355.

The colonizers had arrived not overland but from the seas, and their presence was confined for the most part to low-land coastal areas: "except for a few important mining areas inland, the coastal fringe was everywhere the principal scene of Western economic activity."*

In some remote areas, where reasonably suitable "natural" frontiers existed, the required level of boundary definition was not as great as in other places where there was immediate danger of costly confrontation with a rival. Thus, the British could afford to be vague in their attitude toward the frontier regions on the southern fringe of the Himalayas, which were not the object of colonial competition, but they had to reach a better-defined, more stable equilibrium with the advancing French at the Mekong River. Still, the artificiality of even those boundaries that were agreed on in fairly specific terms is underscored by the fact that there was as little systematic administrative penetration and development in the remote upland interior of clearly defined colonial possessions as there was, relatively speaking, in the inaccessible Himalayan borderlands. The upland peoples who inhabited the remote areas where most land borders were drawn remained isolated and were still left to their own ways. To this day, the legal status of many of these peoples remains undefined.

In spite of the absence of change in the local pattern of life, border areas had taken on a new identity, in the form of a definite legal and cartographic status. Linear

* Ibid.

boundaries were for the first time established in principle and given juridical and cartographic expression in Southeast Asia. The Europeans endowed former frontier zones with the status of linear boundaries, with only the slightest regard for the human and political geography of these areas. Still, marginal frontier zones, formerly areas of contact and interchange in theory as well as in fact, remained in fact what they no longer were in theory. As a result, "there is hardly a single international boundary in the whole of Southeast Asia which would not have called for 'rectification' by the Versailles treaty makers."*

Ill- or well-defined, the imperial frontier system was in the last resort maintained by imperial power. As long as the validity of colonial boundaries was ensured by force, boundary disputes were not of great importance. In fact, a vital function of the colonial boundary system was to separate the respective colonial spheres, to avoid abrasive contact between the competing powers. Boundaries were drawn where buffers could not be found. It mattered little that the boundaries thus agreed upon had scant relation to the local way of life, as colonial boundaries were shaped mainly by the needs of the colonial powers.

In defining political-administrative boundaries, the colonial powers dealt with both internal and external divisions. Since internal boundaries were of less importance in the context of great power competition, they were

* Ibid., p. 366.

drawn somewhat more haphazardly, causing problems for the successor states that later had to deal with them on a sovereign basis. For example, in India,

the border which the British settled upon between Sind and Kutch was tolerable so long as both regions lay within the same larger political unit. As an international boundary it was quite unsuitable. *

Similarly, the boundaries running between Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia have been the object of disputes more difficult of settlement in their new capacity as international boundaries than they had been as internal colonial boundaries. **

In sum, the colonial powers both ignored local factors and introduced extraneous political considerations and alien concepts in the determination of colonial boundaries in Asia. The saving grace of the colonial boundary system was that, while it provided border security (protection against invasion or large-scale territorial encroachment), it never attempted to provide border control. Colonial boundaries never constituted a major obstacle to migrating or wandering peoples and did not significantly interfere with the normal pattern of human traffic in the traditional frontier zones.

As long as the colonial powers were on the scene to lend authoritative enforcement to their international boundaries and internal administrative divisions, these

* Alastair Lamb, Crisis in Kashmir, 1947 to 1966, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., London, 1966, p. 51.

** For a discussion of related problems, see below, pp. 39ff.

arrangements were neither unreasonable nor particularly damaging in their effects on local society. Movement of peoples continued across boundaries; administrative penetration was not radically or obtrusively increased.

Moreover, the imperial system had certain advantages for the colonial wards. Warfare ceased in an area which had hitherto been the scene of almost constant fighting. Though governmental presence did not become overbearing in remote areas where traditional migrations continued, a modicum of security from invasion was provided: one Vietnamese sage wrote that "when a mountain is inhabited by a strong tiger, the others will not dare to come disturb it any longer." J. T. McAlister, Jr. has written that

ironically, through their adaptation of Vietnamese ambitions and traditional relationships, the French created in South-east Asia a colonial empire that was a fulfillment of long-standing goals of Vietnamese expansionism. No longer was there any need for an equilibrium. The power of France was equal to imperial dreams even greater than those of the Vietnamese.*

This statement is appealing but only partially correct. Vietnamese expansionist ambitions were neither totally nor permanently satisfied by the administrative arrangements that the French established in Indochina. Though French power was great, and, relatively speaking, acted to the

* J. T. McAlister, Jr., "The Possibilities for Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," World Politics, Vol. 19, No. 2, Jan. 1967, p. 265.

advantage of the Vietnamese vis-à-vis Laos and Cambodia, this power also restrained the Vietnamese from the kind of perpetual dominance over large portions of Lao and Cambodian territory that they might otherwise have eventually achieved.

Ironically, although the French satisfied the Vietnamese, they may also have kept alive the competing hopes for security of the weak Khmer and Lao states, in relation to both the Vietnamese and the Thais. When the French intervened in 1893, Laos, as has been the case for most of its history, was not a unified state. And as a result of Vietnamese expansion from the seventeenth century on, "the Khmers were pushed out of their villages into Cambodia or into marginal lands near the sea. Perhaps only French protection saved them from extinction or assimilation."*

*Cotter, op. cit., p. 18. See also Louis Malleret, "La Minorité Cambodgienne de Cochinchine." Bulletin de la société des études Indochinoises, Vol. 21, 1946, pp. 26-33.

II. THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN SETTING

All peoples divide up the space they inhabit in some distinct and customary fashion.* In spite of the existence of international legal and diplomatic standards, which have in some respects influenced political behavior in the region,** it is as wrong today as it was in the heyday of imperialism to assume that Western concepts invariably have the same meaning for Southeast Asians as they do for statesmen in the West.

Colonial boundaries in Southeast Asia were the product of interaction between forces exerted by the local environment and those influences introduced by the Europeans. Enduring differences in boundary concepts and practices are in part explained by peculiarities of the ecological setting and historical experience of Southeast Asia. Generally mountainous, the area is characterized by narrow north-south river valleys and few plains capable of supporting a dense population. This results in an unbalanced geographic dispersal of peoples with few centers of relatively great population density. This pattern of settlement has not only prevented regional political unification, it has also made access to and centralized administration of remote areas of unified countries difficult and sporadic.

*This is a largely unexplored question of equal interest to the anthropologist and the geographer. For some interesting examples, see S. B. Jones, "Boundary Concepts in the Setting of Place and Time," Annals, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 49, No. 3, September 1959, pp. 241-255.

**For a discussion of this influence, see pp. 34ff. below.

The region is one of great, though sometimes exaggerated, ethnic complexity.* The basic ethnic division is usually referred to as that between "lowland" and "upland" or "valley" and "hill" peoples. Upland areas have been inhabited by groups of hill tribes or hill peasants in all periods of Southeast Asian history; ancient texts contain many references to these peoples. With their unfamiliar ways, they were regarded as "wild tribes," beasts or slaves by their lowland neighbors, even though during some periods they may have enjoyed equal levels of civilization. Some tribes still cherish oral traditions of their formerly dominant culture.

Along with these cultural differences, there has long been a pattern of interaction or "interpenetration"** between these groups of peoples. Each has profoundly influenced the religious practices of the other -- lowland animism and upland "great tradition" religions bear witness to this ongoing transfer. Some upland tribes were pushed into the hills by the influx and expansion of powerful valley and plains cultivators, while others have both influenced and been absorbed by lowland civilizations.

*Areas of greatest ethnic complexity are for the most part concentrated in limited regions; for this reason, standard ethnolinguistic maps may appear somewhat misleading. Peter Kunstadter has written of Southeast Asia as "a series of patchworks of language, race, ethnic identification, religion and distribution of cultural traits . . . the patches on the quilts are larger in the valley-coast-delta plains areas. . . . The patches are smaller in the folds and creases of the more remote or isolated refuge areas of tribal groups," Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1967, p. 13.

** See the seminal article by Edmund Leach, op. cit., pp. 49-73.

The "wild tribes" have from time immemorial served as mercenaries and irregular fighters, and trafficked in opium and other contraband. In spite of the fragmentation of the region, these contacts have always been present, and are becoming more intense as communications improve and incentives multiply. The Government of the Republic of Vietnam has increased its efforts to win the loyalty of its highland peoples, and the Royal Thai Government has responded to the same challenge through the Hill Tribe Division of the Ministry of Interior, as well as by creating the Border Patrol Police.

Many of the pressures on Southeast Asian boundaries stem from questions of ethnic identification and relations of central governments to minority populations. In the past,

tribal groups, discontented with their lot under a particular government, could easily shift countries by crossing over an undefined or uncontrolled border without becoming a matter of concern to their new hosts.*

In Southeast Asia, the broad outlines of these "uncontrolled borders" were established in colonial times, in an era when geographers still debated the merits of "natural" versus artificial boundaries. Aside from administrative convenience, it was felt that terrain features such as mountains and rivers exercised a natural separating function that was readily transferable to the political sphere. For example, "for the lowlanders, once established

*Kunstadter, op. cit., p. 29.

in the valleys, the mountains have proved to be effective barriers to large-scale movements of population except . . . when the area has been under the pressure of warfare."* The key phrase in this passage is "for the lowlanders." Upland peoples have not felt equally constrained by these geographical barriers. As the British geographer Kirk has pointed out,

. . . To mountain peoples mountains do not necessarily constitute barriers. This is a concept of lowlanders.**

Similar problems arise from the extensive use of rivers, streams, and canals as boundaries between South-east Asian nations. On a small-scale map, a watercourse may appear to be an ideal natural boundary. Drainage is easier to represent on a map than relief, which requires more complex cartographic techniques, and is often more difficult to interpret from map sources. However,

except in the case of a few great rivers, a watercourse rarely constitutes a serious obstacle even for primitive man. On the contrary, it provides him with a double line of communication in its waters and along its valley floor, the valley floor itself forming a natural anthropogeographical environment.***

In the Southeast Asian geographical context, middle and lower river courses generally flow through lowland areas that support relatively dense population concentra-

*Ibid., p. 9.

**William Kirk, "The Inner Asian Frontiers of India," Transactions, Institute of British Geographers, Vol. 31, 1962, p. 156.

***Y. M. Goblet, Political Geography and the World Map, George Philip and Son, Ltd., London, 1955, p. 164. This statement applies to cultural, as opposed to military, considerations.

tions on the basis of irrigated agriculture. In such areas as the Mekong delta of South Vietnam, watercourses provide mobility and facilitate contact rather than separating distinct communities. The people who share a river or stream, living on opposite banks, nominally of different nationalities, often have more in common with each other than they do with their highland compatriots. To them, the presence of a legal border means very little, even if, as their pattern of life remains the same, they suddenly discover they are "smuggling" instead of trading.*

The primary function of any national boundary is to separate or divide the respective areas of political jurisdiction of two different polities. Thus, "Boundaries of State territory are the imaginary lines on the surface of the earth which separate the territory of one State from that of another, or from unappropriated territory, or from the open sea."** Although these definitions are straightforward, boundary functions are complicated by many other factors. Boundaries serve both political and territorial functions. All boundary distinctions are artificial in the sense that they are man-made. A boundary that, politically, separates the territory of one state from that of another, does not physically separate the two boundary states.

*The Thai Ambassador to Laos, Col. Banpot Panichusupphon, has estimated that "more than 10,000 persons cross back and forth between the two countries [Thailand and Laos] regularly," Bangkok World, October 25, 1968.

**Oppenheim, op. cit., p. 531.

Every boundary is an imaginary line and, regardless of the nature of the terrain in the vicinity of the line, its appropriateness and effectiveness depend upon the broad environmental context and its evolution over time. Most boundaries are, in the long run, subjected to pressures that may stretch, move, or breach the original line of division, while other pressures, on both sides, work in the direction of stability and enforcement. Other boundaries, or portions of them, may be extremely stable over time, either because they are in remote areas unaffected by human factors, or because they are in built-up areas where boundary functions have become routinized and virtually taken for granted. In such cases, the existence of a stable boundary may itself exert a stabilizing political influence.

The Southeast Asian environment has not generally enhanced boundary stability. The physical features chosen for boundary lines did not originally exert a true separating function. Rivers and streams encourage active relations between peoples, and mountain ranges do not constitute genuine obstacles unless they are supported by active administration and a sense of identification with the central government that adds to rather than detracts from the validity of the boundary. In an era marked by insurgency and infiltration across national borders, it would be unrealistic to expect Southeast Asian governments to attain complete control of population movements in frontier areas, which would require uniform acceptance of Western boundary concepts in addition to achievement of administrative capabilities unprecedented in the region. In fact, Southeast Asians have developed their own concepts and practices

with regard to boundaries, territory and sovereignty, and their present performance should be considered in relation to the standards that have evolved within the region.

TERRITORIAL DIPLOMACY

Territorial diplomacy has been a consistent feature of inter-"state" relations in Southeast Asia from the earliest times to the present. The basic tenet of this strategy is that if expansion (when relatively strong) is alternated with territorial concession (when weak), in the long run, losses should be minimized and intermediate bargaining advantages maximized. Even today, it is considered more important to use marginal territory for diplomatic purposes (that is, to acquire and then expend it) than merely to maintain control, especially since, in isolated areas, military conquest is more easily achieved than administrative control.

Properly applied, this policy confines destructive fighting to the enemy's lands, frontier marches, or buffer areas.* As long as the Thais, for example, were able to expand into non-Thai territory, subsequent losses of the same territory were tolerable because they did not involve Siam proper.

In spite of strenuous diplomatic maneuverings, Thailand was forced to surrender large tracts of territory. However, the result of this surrender of formerly Thai territory was not only to forestall or prevent further territorial

* In one classic case, "Lan Chang and Ayutthaya . . . shared a common interest in maintaining the Khorat plateau as a wide border area between their two kingdoms. In wars

encroachments by the colonial powers, but also to increase border security in frontier regions that had previously been difficult to control and susceptible to local rebellions, border skirmishes, and invasion. Although Thailand, in contrast to the other nations in Southeast Asia, remained independent, it was nevertheless obliged to accept colonial dictation as to the location of its boundaries.*

Astute practice of territorial diplomacy was instrumental in allowing Siam to retain its independence while its neighbors were succumbing to colonial rule. Beset by both British and French colonial designs, King Mongkut stated in 1864 that

since we are now being constantly abused by the French because we will not allow ourselves to be placed under their domination like the Cambodians, it is for us to decide . . . whether to swim up-river to make friends with the crocodile or to swim out to sea and hang on to the whale.**

He then enunciated a policy that was to stand Siam in good stead for a century: "It is sufficient for us to keep ourselves within our house and home; it may be necessary for us to forego some of our former power and influence."***

The Thais were recognized by their Southeast Asian neighbors as the most successful practitioners of this

between the Lao and the Siamese kingdoms, the Khorat plateau, by virtue of its intermediate location, formed a major battleground." C. V. Keyes, Isan: Regionalism in Northeast Thailand, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1967, p. 7.

* See Hirshfield, op. cit., and Lamb, Asian Frontiers.

** A. L. Moffat, Mongkut, The King of Siam, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1961, p. 124.

*** Ibid.

policy. One Vietnamese scholar wrote:

The Siamese were able to preserve their independence. They are not obliged to defend their frontiers nor are they compelled to protect their interests . . . if we are not now willing to part with some of our territory . . . then we shall lose our entire country. . . . Therefore our best strategy now would consist in cutting off a portion of our territory on the frontier area and giving it to the French. Then they will defend these frontier regions for us. In exchange for an eternal peace favorable to the entire population, we shall merely lose a small portion of our country.*

With the passage of time, Thailand's stock of marginal territory has been exhausted. This valuable resource, and the manner in which it was meted out by Thai statesmen, played an important role in protecting Thailand's independence, while partially satisfying expansionist colonial ambitions. Between 1850 and 1909, Thailand lost about 90,000 square miles of territory, most of it in Cambodia and the Malay states, to the French and British. During World War II, Thailand, with Japanese cooperation, reasserted old claims and occupied parts of western Cambodia and the northern Malay states; when the war ended in defeat for Japan, Thailand again surrendered non-Thai territory to comply with the victors' demands. Since World War II, the loss of buffer territory has made Thailand a more vulnerable country; as Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman has stated, 'We here in Thailand have no place to retreat to. No place to withdraw to. So we

* Truong Buu Lam, Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900, Monograph Series No. 11, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 1967, citing Memorials on Reforms (1866-1868) by Nguyen Troung To, pp. 89-90.

will make our first stand here -- and our last."* In spite of ethnic problems in North and Northeast Thailand, those areas, unlike the Cambodian provinces that were annexed in wartime, are no longer considered dispensable by the Thai government.

Territorial diplomacy depended upon in fact, and was reinforced in theory by, a vivid sense of "center" as opposed to "periphery."** In practice, the "periphery" could represent either the area of another country, of a vassal, or of a remote or mountainous region of the kingdom itself. For expanding "valley" civilizations, the terrain of transvalley hills was forbidding, and the hill peoples, even when conquered, were extremely difficult to control. Kautilya warned that

The king shall avoid taking possession of any country which is liable to the inroads of enemies and wild tribes and which is harassed by frequent visitations of famine and pestilence.***

The pattern of center and periphery conforms to the concentric cosmological world conception of Hindu mythology,

* C.V.J. Murphy, "Thailand's Fight to the Finish," Fortune, October 1965, Vol. 72, pp. 122-127.

** For example, Leach states that Nanchao "should not be thought of as a state with borders but as a capital city with a wide and variable sphere of influence. The inhabitants of Nanchao had no specific identification with the state, there was no Nanchao nation which would be dispersed by the elimination of Nanchao as a separate entity." Leach, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

*** Arthashastra, translated by R. Shamasastry Kautilya, 8th ed., Mysore Printing and Publishing House, Mysore, 1951, p. 54. The Arthashastra of Kautilya, which dates from ca. 321-296 B.C., is an Indian classic of great vitality, written 2000 years before Machiavelli's The Prince, with which it is often compared.

with the throne as the center of the kingdom, and with the capital and the outlying provinces, vassalages, and neighboring realms represented as a series of concentric rings. Thus, a ready-made schedule of priorities was available to the statesmen of the kingdom.

Although it usually became necessary in the long run to yield conquered lands, the possession of alien territory did offer an interim advantage: it provided geographical insulation and diplomatic insurance. If the stock of disposable alien territory was exhausted, a vassalage could be yielded in time of duress. And if it came to the worst, peripheral territory could be given up in order to ensure the maintenance of sovereignty in the kingdom's center. Thus,

When a powerless king finds himself attacked by a powerful king, . . . he should submissively sue for peace on the condition of offering treasure, army, himself or his territory.*

When by ceding a part of the territory, the rest of the kingdom with its subjects are kept safe, it is termed "ceded," and is of advantage to one who is desirous of destroying thieves and other wicked persons infesting the ceded part.**

Although frontiers were not usually well defined, problems of effective control did create a kind of frontier-sensitivity; with each country trying to maximize its territorial advantage, expansion and contraction were the only alternatives. In Kautilyan diplomacy, peace was war by

* Ibid., p. 268.

** Ibid., p. 335.

other means. In this unstable international framework, the more a country was forced to contract, the more pressing would be its need for subsequent expansion if a long-run equilibrium was to be maintained.

The moving frontier was a means of gauging and aligning the international equilibrium. Sovereignty was not defined in a rigorous territorial sense. Marginal territorial concessions were not viewed as fatal to the kingdom. As long as the essence of sovereignty -- the nuclear kingdom -- was unimpaired, such concessions were a legitimate instrument of policy.

Even in peaceful times, order and surveillance were not easily maintained in remote areas. The capacity to administer remote areas, often peopled by wandering tribes, would not have permitted a strict territorial definition of sovereignty. Ethnically speaking, in Southeast Asia most of "the political entities in question had interpenetrating political systems, they were not separate countries inhabited by distinct populations."* Even within the broadly defined territorial limits of the state, the authority of the central government was not everywhere taken for granted, and similar conditions still apply in many areas of the subcontinent.

* Leach, Comparative Studies, p. 50.

III. THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORY

The foregoing discussion is, in a sense, an introduction to the problem of evaluating the relevance of past concepts and practices to present policy questions. What lessons are there to be learned from this comparative approach? For an integrated evaluation, this analysis will rely on (1) a survey of similarities to complement the treatment of differences in point of view, (2) a description of the interaction between Western and South-east Asian approaches to territorial problems, and (3) a search for both persistence and change in concept and practice.

In theory, sovereignty was just as important to the most short-lived Southeast Asian principality as it was to the nations of Europe. The crucial difference was in content; in Southeast Asia, the preservation of sovereignty was less dependent upon the maintenance of absolute territorial integrity as defined by existing borders. The Vietnamese experience provides a ready example. While one eminent historian refers to "the continuous Vietnamese awareness of an insistence upon the territorial identity and integrity of the Vietnamese homeland,"* and another affirms that unlike other countries in Southeast Asia,

Vietnam during the nineteenth century, and earlier, was already a nation. The Vietnamese people possessed a definite territory,

*H. Benda, in the Preface to Truong Buu Lam, op. cit., p. iv.

spoke one language, shared common traditions,
and were born of a single historical experience,*

it is questionable how "definite" the alleged territorial identity and integrity really was. Politically, Vietnam was not truly unified, and ethnically, there was, and still is, interpenetration rather than integration. Vietnamese emperors spoke grandly of "the mountains and rivers," but they did not rely on maps, treaties, and legalisms, and the territorial aspect of their sovereignty was never clearly defined until French mapmakers and boundary commissions devoted themselves to that task. In a more contemporary case, Cambodia has stated its willingness to abandon all outstanding territorial claims against its neighbors in exchange for unilateral declarations expressing recognition of Cambodia within its present borders. Attainment of security is regarded as more important than the pursuit of minor claims to territory.

Most Southeast Asian countries owe their present boundary alignments to colonial action. The only conclusive way to settle boundary disputes is to determine accurately the whereabouts and nature of boundaries that were drawn during the colonial period, no matter how inappropriate some of these boundaries may have been. Even where local boundaries have a long history, their accurate definition has depended upon the techniques of surveying and cartography that Europe brought to Asia.

Colonial boundaries represented an alien superimposition on a dynamic indigenous civilization. These

*Truong Buu Lam, p. 31.

alien institutions survived on the one hand because they were backed by force, and on the other hand because the rules of the game they established applied more to competing imperial powers than to the peoples whose lives they would have affected had they been enforced more strictly.

Colonial maps, treaties, and boundaries were adequate for Western needs, in that they resulted in territorial definition while avoiding costly colonial wars, but they were not particularly relevant to the local environment. The boundary system "kept the lid on," but after the departure of the colonialists, border disputes re-emerged between most of the contiguous countries in mainland Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, the European impact altered the terms in which these issues were subsequently dealt with. Disputes now tend to be debated in legalistic terms, often with both parties relying on colonial maps, treaties, and administrative acts, and with the international forums of the United Nations, the World Court, and the press as the scene of their pronouncements; the successor states rarely resort to armed confrontation in conflicts over territory, their bellicose threats notwithstanding.

Although Southeast Asian leaders have generally adopted the form and style of their Western mentors and counterparts in dealing with foreign policy issues, it should by no means be assumed that they have thereby conclusively parted with traditional views and practices. It is sometimes easier to rely on verbal exchanges in the international arena than it is to sustain effective

military and administrative control in remote areas. It was just as difficult for colonial administrators and advisors to extend effective central control to far-flung provinces as it had always been for the local rulers. This situation was in part the result of pre-colonial conditions and in part the result of colonial administrative techniques. The colonialists concentrated on hardening the perimeter, neglecting, as both their predecessors and successors have done, to build out to the fringe on a sound administrative basis.

The colonial legacy of Southeast Asian leaders was thus an ambiguous one. They inherited a boundary system that, in its broad outlines, was satisfactory enough as a territorial basis for modern nationhood. Yet their nations were not integrated ethnically, and they lacked the administrative apparatus either to enforce their borders or to build out to them. Military and police powers were not adequate, nor were they designed for operations in remote areas. Colonial administration did not restructure bureaucratic incentives in a way that might have overcome the hardship and loss of status that service in the remote interior had entailed since the earliest days of the Southeast Asian court societies. This administrative heritage, which makes service in far-flung regions punitive or undesirable, is another example of the cumulative impact of past experience. Communications and technology are improving, if unevenly, but time-honored bureaucratic incentives are slow to change; often, entirely new administrative structures must be created to perform new functions, and novel financial arrangements have to be made. The inhabitants of remote

areas had meanwhile become accustomed to being left alone, which in many cases they valued as non-interference, rather than being disappointed because of government "neglect." In short, the incentives, capabilities, and local environment all worked against the establishment of effective machinery for border control or strong government penetration in remote areas.

The outcome was a double standard in territorial policy. The Europeans insisted on definition, but they did not build up, and thus did not pass on, an effective legal or administrative apparatus that could have given practical meaning to the boundary system after colonial power had been withdrawn. These conditions have not changed significantly since the end of the colonial era. The United States has provided encouragement and assistance to its allies, Thailand and South Vietnam, in the development of improved border control facilities, but the administrative picture is still much the same as it has always been. Old attitudes are protected, or insulated, by the new standards that permit propaganda and diplomacy to substitute, at least partially, for greater administrative penetration and more effective enforcement. Alliance policies, as in Thailand and Vietnam, have resulted in improved capabilities, but it is noteworthy that incentives have changed little. Foreign assistance, by providing a substitute for local effort, may even undermine incentives while raising capabilities.*

Differences in boundary policy between Western and Southeast Asian nations are partly offset, and partly

*For further discussion of this point, see p. 44.

obscured, by the mixture of modern (international) and traditional (parochial) standards found in contemporary Southeast Asian statecraft. Past precedents of trading territory for national survival have not been forgotten. In modern terms, this practice has been translated into the tacit toleration of unauthorized use or occupation of parts of the territory of one nation by foreign forces or tribal migrants from another. Because so much importance has been attached to the formal aspect of sovereignty, these incursions occur on a de facto basis, while the official line either condemns or does not acknowledge a condition that the central government is powerless to contest. The Royal Laotian Government is unable to deny use of its territory to either the Pathet Lao insurgents or the units of the North Vietnamese Army in transit to South Vietnam. Tribal refugees from the fighting in Laos have filtered across the border into Thailand. Cambodian officials have acknowledged "temporary infiltrations" of Cambodian territory, while denying that there has been any "permanent occupation" by Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army personnel.*

It should be emphasized that boundary or territorial policy is composed of a set of interrelated, but not necessarily consistent, elements, ranging from the detail of local administrative practices to the complexities of diplomatic debate. The following section undertakes an analysis of the varied components of boundary policy. Identification of these elements should lead to better

* See the statements by Penn Nouth, president of the Cambodian Council of Ministers, Le Sangkum (Phnom Penh), No. 40, November 1968.

understanding of the disparate pressures that shape policy at different levels, and may be of use in pinpointing those policy areas where foreign advice and assistance can most effectively be brought to bear.

IV. A POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR TERRITORIAL ISSUES

In most of the developed world, boundaries are well-defined, their jurisdictional rules are well observed, and political disputes no longer center about territorial issues (with the possible exception of disputes over territorial waters). Several factors contribute to these conditions:

- a) Spectacular changes in military technology, particularly in nuclear weaponry and delivery systems, seem to have made political boundaries meaningless in case of war.
- b) In the developed West, the advanced evolution of state functions up to and at national boundaries has allowed the respective states' administrative "reach" or penetration to give full meaning to the concept of the boundary as the limit of sovereignty. Modern states are able to take their boundaries for granted because state power, at least potentially, can be applied as effectively in outlying areas as in the central regions.
- c) With the spread of populations and administrative control, ambiguous frontiers were gradually subject to greater definition, and this development has resulted in precise maps which accurately portray definitive international boundaries.

In the developing world, however, boundary functions are still the object of acute interest, and what we may refer to as "boundary policy" is a legitimate area of national concern, involving a set of complex issues.

In terms of national policy, the significance of an international boundary is limited neither geographically nor politically to the immediate area in which the boundary line is emplaced. Boundary functions, and thus boundary policy, are related to several political levels, each of which involves diverse policy considerations:

- a) International policy, affecting states other than those which share a specific boundary, often comes into play in boundary disputes. Declaratory and action policies may be directed toward various international forums (the United Nations, the World Court, International Commission of Jurists, and certain regional organizations) or toward other countries, particularly allies, that are indirectly concerned. At the international level, there may be a whole set of policies with differing targets and objectives.
- b) Boundary-state policies affect two or more states sharing the boundary in question, and may also vary; if a state shares borders with more than one other country, its policies regarding each border may be the same, or different, and may be fixed either independently or in a manner that reflects the relation of policies and events affecting one boundary to outcomes at other boundaries.
- c) Domestic considerations often influence boundary policy, in a manner that reflects the relative importance of various political groups as well as the transitory national priorities which

relate domestic and international policy.

Pronouncements for mass consumption may differ from the deliberations of the political elite (and its factions). Domestic minority policy frequently relates to boundary policy, particularly if there is a sizeable minority from (or identified with) an adjacent state. Similarly, if there is an emigrant (or other culturally related) group residing across the boundary, domestic options may be constrained.

- d) Local policy affects areas in the immediate vicinity of or along the lines of access to the border, and local issues sometimes place considerable strain on policies set at other levels.
- e) Within the larger political framework, qualities of the boundary and its local environment exert an influence on the nature and effectiveness of policy. These factors include:
 - (i) accessibility of the border area (from each side)
 - (ii) clarity (extent of delineation/demarcation) and appropriateness (relation to physical and human geography of the area) of the boundary
 - (iii) original purpose of the boundary (internal or international)
 - (iv) evolution of state functions on each side of the boundary
 - (v) evolution of the local environment,

especially patterns of settlement and mobility, on each side; has the popu-
lace adapted to the boundary in a way
that tends to reinforce or to break
down the separating function of the
boundary?

- f) Consistency, control, and coordination among the various policy levels are key factors in analyzing any boundary dispute. Many questions arise in this respect:

(i) Consistency: Are international policies directed at different targets consistent with each other, or do they at least reflect a pattern that is designed to achieve a single purpose? Are international policies consistent with positions taken vis-à-vis various boundary-states? Are there differences in relations with different boundary-states, or is there a uniform outlook on territorial issues? To what extent do these relationships reflect the requirements of domestic politics? What possible precedents are created, and what outside interests are potentially affected by boundary policies?

(ii) Control: What extent of control does the central government exercise over the application of state functions at the boundary or in remote areas in general?

Are special problems created by minorities, refugees, dissidents, or groups such as smugglers and gunrunners?

- (iii) Coordination: How is policy influenced or constrained by the administrative apparatus available for the implementation of policy at different levels? What bureaucratic structures are involved, and what are their capabilities? Do bureaucratic incentives influence the implementation of policy? Are there any special governmental instrumentalities involved? Is there conflict or competition among the services and agencies involved in dealing with border problems? What is the status of communications facilities, both vertically and horizontally?

Within the various dimensions of boundary policy, different attitudes or practices may occur. At each level, the options of one country toward another might be represented by six categories:*

- nonconcern
- cooperation
- incursion
- excursion
- mutual hostility
- irregular/unregulated uncontrolled movement

* These terms are self-explanatory except for "incursion" and "excursion." The latter two terms signify some form of aggression by one side or the other, short of mutual hostility or open war. Thus, for country A,

To illustrate the application of various boundary policy options at different levels, let us consider the following examples:

Policies of Country A Toward Country B

Policy Level	Policy Option
international	nonconcern
boundary state	cooperation
domestic	
elite	cooperation
mass	excursion (i.e., hostile propaganda)
minority (internal)	excursion (i.e., persecution)
local	excursion (clandestine exfiltration), uncontrolled migratory movement

In this example, there is no overt expression of international policy by either side, though there is cooperation between the two states sharing the boundary. The political elite of country A voices friendly sentiments toward its neighbor B, but, for its own reasons, it carries on a campaign of vilification in the national press, for mass consumption, and it uses the minority population from the adjacent country as its scapegoat. Meanwhile, events at the local level are inconsistent with, or beyond the control of, expressed national policy. There

excursion might stand for verbal abuse in an international forum, a propaganda campaign in the domestic press, or exfiltration of irregular or conventional military units; from the point of view of country B, the policies of country A would be regarded as incursions.

is clandestine exfiltration across the boundary, blending in with uncontrolled migratory movement, which is itself the result of inadequate exercise of state functions at the border. In the case of country A, one might well ask, how do these contradictory elements add up, or how should we evaluate the "real" policy of country A toward country B? But before going on to this interesting question, let us consider one more example, that of countries Y and Z:

Policies of Country Y Toward Country Z

Policy Level	Policy Option
international	mutual hostility
boundary state	nonconcern (inaction)
domestic	
elite	mutual hostility
mass	nonconcern
local	cooperation

In this case, the representatives of the two countries berate each other with resounding invective in the United Nations, there is acrimonious litigation at The Hague, and relations are severely strained by a complicated legal dispute concerning jurisdiction over ten square miles of unproductive land astride a disputed boundary. However, the battle is waged in the international arena, and the governments of the two states express no practical concern with the problem in their day-to-day administration. The political elite of both countries are hostile to the claims of their rivals, but public opinion is not aroused by what seems to be a rather remote quarrel. Furthermore, the population in the vicinity of the border, which has never been clearly demarcated, is oblivious to the issue, and the

related peoples on both sides of the disputed border continue to cooperate with each other as they have always done.

Both Country A and Country Y exhibit inconsistency in the options they have chosen at different levels of boundary policy. It is difficult to add up the contradictory elements and arrive at a judgment as to what either country's "real" policy is. Country Y appears to be in a state of hostility with its neighbor, at least if one listens to the charges it makes in the international arena, but this policy does not reach down to the local level, where cooperation continues. Country A, on the other hand, has a congenial official line, but it apparently tolerates use of its soil as a base for guerrilla incursions into its neighbor's territory.

These examples show that boundary policy is a complicated set of interrelated but not necessarily consistent elements, each of which must be analyzed in its proper context. In some cases, it would be wrong to regard specific elements of boundary policy as representative of national policy in general. In analyzing any boundary dispute, all factors in the broad political framework should be considered.

V. POLICY APPLICATIONS

This analysis has concentrated on the political framework of boundary functions in order to emphasize the continuing importance of territorial issues, and to point out that, while most developed countries are able to take their boundaries for granted and are relatively free from territorial disputes, these problems are still of great concern to developing countries. The broad context of boundary issues has been described to underline the political complexity of this area of national policy; most previous boundary studies have focused too narrowly on the disputed boundary itself, without delving into the political context that shapes the conflict.

Policy toward the boundary disputes of other countries should be guided by full consideration of the political issues underlying conflicting territorial claims. While it is useful to take account of the local point of view, we have also noted that the present policies of most Southeast Asian nations are a combination of "modern" and "traditional" factors. Having identified some of the key elements of boundary policy, it may now be easier to pinpoint those aspects of policy where one pattern or the other clearly predominates, and to indicate both opportunities and danger spots for the application of outside advice and assistance.

THE INTERNATIONAL BORDERS OF VIETNAM

The status of any country's efforts to control movement across its boundaries is an important item of national

policy with implications for international, boundary state, domestic and local politics. The complex international aspects of Vietnamese border policy involve both international pressures on Vietnam and international repercussions of events in Vietnam.

International Pressures

The present conflict in Vietnam involves:

- a) a partitioned and war-torn nation, with international intervention on a large scale;
- b) several allies, for some of whom border policies might set important precedents or might have other noteworthy ramifications (Thailand and Korea in particular, see below);
- c) complex ongoing political and military negotiations. Laos and Cambodia, which share borders with Vietnam,

also present many problems of an international nature:

- a) Laos is experiencing a many-sided conflict, with internal political division between the Pathet Lao and the Royal Laotian Government related to fighting in Vietnam;
- b) Laos has already been the subject of complex international negotiations, and further negotiations are not ruled out;
- c) Cambodia also has a many-sided conflict involving North Vietnamese, local insurgents, South Vietnamese, Viet Cong, United States forces, and Cambodia's own security forces;

- d) Both Laos and Cambodia share borders with Thailand. These borders, already the scene of various disputes, may be sensitive to policies and events on the Vietnamese border;
- e) There already exists an International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC),* with responsibilities in all of the former Indochinese states;
- f) Both through the ICSC and alliances of the parties to the Vietnam war, not to mention other interests in the situation in Vietnam, international political considerations will therefore apply to all conceivable border policies for Vietnam.

International Repercussions

The international implications of Vietnamese border policy could go far beyond the effects on countries directly involved in the present conflict.

There is a well-established international demonstration effect in the field of military hardware; successful new military technology is usually desired by other countries with similar problems. If a novel border control technology is developed for South Vietnam, emplacement of an effective system in Vietnam could stimulate demand for similar systems in other countries with disputed or threatened borders. The first two nations to be affected might be Thailand and Korea. Both have active border problems of their own, are firm allies of the United States,

* Popularly but erroneously known as the ICC (International Control Commission).

and have provided large numbers of troops to aid the Allied war effort in Vietnam. Both divided Korea and threatened Thailand would probably have an interest in procuring suitable versions of the latest in border control systems, and this interest might well take the form of requests for technical and economic assistance from the United States.

The international implications of territorial policy are least directly related to practical aspects of border security. The international policies of Southeast Asian nations are couched in relatively modern, Western terms and, on the surface, the difference in setting has little impact on the nature of policy. However, international-level policy is only one element of boundary policy, and its true meaning must be sought in relation to its overall context. In this sense, international policy is a means of expression, following accepted standards of international discourse, and its content is part form, part style, and part substance. As often as not, this aspect of policy is designed to further objectives in relation to boundary states, domestic politics, or local requirements. These expressions should be understood as part of a multiple standard. Insistence on the recognition of "territorial integrity," for example, is in part intended as a substitute for enforcement capability; foreign guarantees or technical assistance serve in part to forestall the necessity for restructuring of bureaucratic incentives; international propaganda and even litigation represent one way to satisfy domestic political requirements or keep alive dated claims with virtually no investment of scarce resources.

Border security problems can be understood not only in terms of the "hardness" of the border itself, but also in terms of the degree of administrative penetration of remote areas by the central government -- the problem of building out to fringe areas. A boundary is an international phenomenon; administrative reach is an entirely domestic issue. Emphasis on the legal sanctity or hardness of the perimeter, as an international issue, takes the sting out of the problem of internal administrative reform. Insistence on the importance of "sanctuary" in counterinsurgency operations diverts attention from the weakness of the central government's projection into its own territory.

In the early stages of many insurgencies, "sanctuary" would still exist even if the border were shifted fifty or a hundred miles in either direction; crossing an international border is in some respects less significant than the absence of effective government presence in outlying provinces. Under present conditions in Thailand, for example, the fact that insurgents may be able to take sanctuary in neighboring Laos is perhaps no more significant than their ability to find refuge in areas within Thailand that are inaccessible to government administrators or security forces. Similar conditions applied in the earlier stages of the conflict in Vietnam. In later stages, the problem of sanctuary may become more acute, particularly if the government and its allies conduct large-scale military operations near the border, but the administrative problems still remain. Even in contemporary Vietnam, there are many internal "sanctuaries" where government forces cannot operate effectively.

The Boundary States: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

One country can hardly take unilateral steps affecting its own border security without affecting the interests of the other countries that share the same border. In the course of the conflict in Vietnam, Cambodia has complained repeatedly of allied incursions into its territory. During 1968, by unofficial count, Cambodia registered approximately seventy formal protests against the United States-South Vietnamese forces, claiming over one hundred and fifty separate violations of Cambodian soil, airspace and territorial waters, and at least two hundred civilian casualties. In the interest of ensuring its own security, Cambodia's present position is to express willingness to abandon all further territorial claims against its neighbors while requesting all nations to make unilateral declarations (which do not have treaty status) recognizing and respecting Cambodia's territorial integrity within its present frontiers.

The apparent violations of Cambodian territorial integrity have been the result of United States-South Vietnamese efforts to maintain the security of the Vietnamese border provinces, but these actions clearly affect Cambodian interests as well. Although the United States has admitted that on occasion its troops may stray into Cambodian territory, and has affirmed the right to "return fire in immediate self-defense" across the border, it has sought justification in the fact that North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces have used parts of Cambodia as staging areas and sanctuaries. Accordingly, any Cambodian admissions to this effect have been carefully noted.*

* For example, see "Cambodia Admits Sanctuary Role,"

Many Cambodian protests of incursions by allied forces, however, have been accompanied by claims of Cambodian civilian casualties. The Cambodian government has been concerned not only with the technicality of unauthorized border crossings, but with the more compelling facts of violence done to civilians who inhabit the border regions. Cambodian acknowledgment, first of the "passage or nonpermanent presence of some armed Vietnamese," and, later, that "many of them have come to live on our territory,"* was rarely accompanied by allegations that North Vietnamese or Viet Cong soldiers had inflicted civilian casualties or other damage upon Cambodia. The number of such allegations increased about the time that the United States issued a declaration on April 16, 1969, recognizing Cambodia within its present frontiers.**

North Vietnamese infiltrators are usually restrained from all but vital contact with the local populace. As long as these forces remained briefly, or simply passed through Cambodia for purposes of infiltration into Vietnam, Cambodia seemed to have been resigned to their unauthorized presence. But late in March 1969, Cambodian statements

The New York Times, October 5, 1968, and "Cambodia Admits Troops' Presence," The New York Times, November 30, 1968. On April 16, 1969, The New York Times, p. 11, reported that "American officials estimate that 30,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops operate back and forth across the Cambodian border and that 10,000 more may be stationed there."

*The first phrase is from a monitored broadcast, Phnom Penh in French to Southeast Asia, December 11, 1968, citing a report by the chief of the general staff of the Khmer Army; the latter phrase is cited in the article "Cambodia Admits Sanctuary Role," op. cit.

**The declaration read, "In conformity with the United Nations Charter, the United States of America recognizes and respects the sovereignty, independence, neutrality and

about the presence of Viet Cong units became much more explicit, and were accompanied by charges that Viet Cong troops had attacked and destroyed Cambodian police posts near the South Vietnamese border, killing several Cambodian policemen and local officials.* Even with the improvement in U.S.-Cambodian relations, a South Vietnamese policy of strict enforcement of the present border could have diverse effects on Cambodia. Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army troops already in Cambodia could be fenced in, unable to leave Cambodia to perform their missions in Vietnam. If they were cut off from their targets in Vietnam, and if even a small contingent remained in Cambodia, these forces might create grave problems for Cambodian security. In statements in March and April 1969, Prince Sihanouk expressed concern about the threat to Cambodian security posed by North Vietnamese troops and the aid they might provide to Cambodian rebels.

The Cambodian reaction to a Vietnamese-initiated closing-off of the border might be to term this an aggressive or imperialistic act on the part of the Vietnamese. Such claims would be related to territorial disputes between Cambodia and Vietnam, unresolved by U.S. recognition of Cambodian borders, as well as to the delicate problem of the Khmer minority in Vietnam. Cambodia has long claimed that the 500,000 Khmers in Vietnam have been mistreated and

territorial integrity of the kingdom of Cambodia within its present frontiers."

*The New York Times, April 16-17, 1969.

discriminated against,* and the sealing off of the border could be regarded in Cambodian propaganda as part of a Vietnamese campaign against the Khmer-Vietnamese. In spite of these charges, the greatest danger to Cambodia lies in the spillover of the Vietnam war into Cambodia, and the presence of North Vietnamese troops there. Cambodia's moves to improve relations with the United States demonstrate Prince Sihanouk's recognition of this fact; better relations with the United States might help to reduce the temptation of the American military command in Saigon to request permission to bomb or make attacks on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong concentrations in Cambodia. It should be noted, however, that rapprochement with the United States would not necessarily signal a change in Cambodia's attitude toward the South Vietnamese Government.

Relations between Vietnam and Cambodia have never been very amicable. In their southward expansion, the Vietnamese displaced the Khmers from much of their former territory; perhaps only the French colonial administration kept the Khmers from being completely overrun by the expansive Vietnamese. The result of this continuing conflict has been a tradition of animosity, grounded mainly on Cambodian fear and distrust of all Vietnamese, and any allies who join the Vietnamese in threatening Cambodia. It is often contended that Cambodia's greatest fear is of an aggressive, united Vietnam -- thus explaining Cambodian willingness to tolerate temporary occupation of areas near the Vietnamese frontier, in the interest of prolonging

*In recent years, Cambodia has frequently protested against alleged "genocidal" policies of the South Vietnamese Government against the Khmer-Vietnamese.

the conflict in Vietnam, while denying (or even admitting ruefully) the presence of North Vietnamese Army units in Cambodia, in the interest of maintaining a correct international position.

The present analysis would also suggest that the Cambodian position involves a double standard of insistence on its international rights, along with inability to take effective measures to ensure those rights and to observe the letter of its own pronounced international policy.

A similar case could be stated for Laos, with the main differences being that (a) Laos probably has more troops than Cambodia, (b) the internal political situation in divided Laos is more confused and precarious, and (c) Laos does not have the same serious disputes with Thailand that plague Cambodia.

Domestic Politics -- Vietnam

In the past, adequate border control has not been given high priority by the Vietnamese Government. There are several reasons for this outlook: (a) there has never been an acute consciousness anywhere in Southeast Asia of the essentially Western concept of a fixed, legal border; in the past, frontiers were determined mainly by transitory power relationships, and the administrative inability to penetrate remote areas limited both the incentive and the capacity to provide effective border control; (b) present borders in Southeast Asia are largely the result of colonial dictation, and their enforcement during the colonial era was left to imperial power; local regimes have not developed the habits and reflexes of border control; (c) in many areas, patterns of trade, communication, and

settlement across and astride international boundaries have not conformed to these artificial political divisions.

In spite of the obvious wartime infiltration problem in Vietnam, this traditional outlook has not changed significantly. Indeed, the incentive to develop effective border control mechanisms has been held in abeyance, as the United States has in large part taken on the problem as its own. Under these conditions, U.S. admonitions to the Vietnamese on the subject of infiltration control have apparently been undermined by U.S. determination to carry on its own interdiction program. It is therefore not without significance that the United States has taken the initiative in sponsoring studies and devising counterinfiltration systems for South Vietnam. The United States has also played a similar role in Thailand as a proponent and sponsor of the Thai Border Patrol Police.

Local Issues

The present international borders of Vietnam are based upon internal administrative boundaries established by the French. The intended purposes of internal boundaries are not identical to those of international boundaries. In theory, international boundaries should play a more important separating role than do internal divisions, which serve mainly administrative purposes.

The present international boundaries of Vietnam were not originally intended to serve as such. French surveyors apparently established them with administrative convenience, rather than effective performance, in mind. In the delta area, for example, considerable portions of the Cambodia-Vietnam border follow a major or minor watercourse -- a feature

which simplified the task of the boundary commission, but which encourages rather than minimizes transboundary movement of goods and people. In the delta, water means mobility; streams and canals, like the major river basins, exert a unifying, not separating, function. Canals in particular facilitate movement and communication both lengthwise and breadthwise. This is easily visible if one observes the physical pattern of settlement along any of the canals which interlace the delta. Houses and other buildings are strung out along the banks, often to a depth of only one structure, with seasonally inundated ricefields directly behind the inhabited areas.

This pattern of settlement suggests that the separating function of the boundary was never strongly exercised, and that it has wrought little change in the customary organization of life in the immediate vicinity of the boundary. At the same time, the power of the state has never been firmly applied to the problem of border control; it was accorded very low priority, and in any case capabilities were limited.

In border areas, illicit trade is beneficial to both sides and is tolerated by both governments on a de facto basis. The loss of customs revenue is disregarded because of the impossibility of enforcement. Some of this trade has been channelized and regularized (transportation by truck, existence of regular markets, etc.), but this is in part the result of non-enforcement of customs and other regulations. It seems likely that, if regulatory pressure were suddenly applied only at certain points, new forms of diversion or accommodation would be reached, and the flows

might be more spread out, but not greatly reduced. The physical geography of the border area, and the patterns of normal human traffic, have not changed significantly since the conversion from an internal to an international boundary.

A similar development has occurred along the highland portion of the Vietnamese border with Laos, although the problems presented by physical and human geography are quite different in the case of the Laotian border. There, transboundary movement is along mountain ridges and river valleys, population density is low and the population, though similar on both sides of the border, consists mainly of tribal groups rather than lowland Vietnamese or Khmers. But in the highlands, as in the delta area, there has been little or no evolution of state functions at the boundary, and the local environment has therefore not adapted in conformity with the international boundary.

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